



TEXAS JUVENILE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

Response to the Independent Ombudsman Third Quarter Report, FY 2019 July 29, 2019

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has received the FY 2019 Third Quarter Report from the Office of the Independent Ombudsman (OIO), and appreciates this opportunity to respond and provide a summary of the last quarter for TJJD.

First, TJJD would like to provide some updates from the previous quarterly report issued by the OIO. The TJJD secure facilities have begun the increased search requirements for entry into the secure facilities and for properly screening youth mail. Since the issue related to contraband that was highlighted in the last report, the McLennan County State Juvenile Correctional Facility has seen decreased numbers of contraband on campus. Total incidents regarding possession of controlled substances has decreased from a total of 26 incidents from January-March 2019, to only one incident since April 2019. The OIO was also able to close the issue regarding contraband on the May site visit report.

Also, TJJD Office of Inspector General (OIG) continues to make progress on hiring security and peace officers. Through the end of August, the OIG is scheduled to add five additional security officers to perform gatehouse operations. Within the coming months, OIG still expects to perform all gatehouse operations at the five secure facilities. As mentioned in the previous quarterly report response, OIG was integral to the agency's response to the illegal contraband issue.

Incident Reporting

The escape/attempted escape reported for the Gainesville facility was an incident where a youth fled apprehension after tampering with a safety device. The youth never left campus or breached campus security fencing. He was subsequently transferred to the Phoenix program.

TJJD is encouraged to see a decline in the total reported incidents of gang related activity across the board. This is highlighted in the fact that the OIO has been able to close specific issues relating to gang incidents at Gainesville and Evins from their site visit reports. As TJJD points out in site visit reports, gang related incidents are minor rule violations defined as, "participating in an activity or behavior that promotes the interests of a gang or possessing or exhibiting anything related to or signifying a gang, such as, but not limited to, gang-related literature, symbols, or signs." See 37 TAC § 380.9503(j)(5). Agency data shows that the majority of incidents coded as "gang related" involve youth displaying symbols or marking property with graffiti. The TJJD OIG opened 165 fewer gang intelligence investigations from second quarter, FY 19, and 129 fewer investigations from third quarter, FY 18.

Texas Model updates

Over the last quarter, TJJD has continued its focus on expanding the Texas Model at each secure facility. On June 1, TJJD changed the position title and job descriptions of the Juvenile Correctional Officers to Youth Development Coaches. This change was part of the Agency's redefining the role of the direct-care staff; a good coach connects with youth and focuses on their development, helps them strive to do better, guides them through hard times, and teaches them valuable life skills. This is exactly what TJJD seeks from its coaches. The Agency has underscored the need for coaches to understand the youth in their care, identify escalating behavior early, provide for an environment of engagement, and keep their youth safe. In conjunction with changing the working title for the coaches, the agency changed the name of the JCO supervisors to "Senior Coach" and is requiring all dorm supervisory staff to be on the dorm with the youth, and not away from the youth performing mainly administrative functions.

As of the most recent agency data, 530 direct-care staff have received training on the Texas Model trauma informed care principles. Recognizing the need for the continuity of trauma informed care principles on all areas of the facilities, TJJD has trained 221 educational staff at the secure facilities. Additionally, all facilities are operating with stable coach assignments on the dorms. This is crucial for the staff to be able to build appropriate relationships with the youth in order to better help the youth regulate their behaviors. When staff know the youth they are working with every day, they have a better ability to intervene when the youth become dysregulated. In the past, the agency required the direct-care staff to rotate at intervals that precluded the building of appropriate relationships. Although TJJD is required to ensure coaches rotate, the focus will be more youth-centered, ensuring a continuity of care so that staff can continue to build the necessary relationships with their youth.

In addition to stable coach assignments, TJJD is focused on having stable youth assignments. With the exception of the sexual behavior treatment program, all of the dorms on the secure facilities are now youth-centered. This means that instead of the youth living on a dorm that correlates to their treatment program, they are able to participate in treatment programs that are not attached to their living space. Treatment groups are now conducted similar to the educational classroom setting, where youth are pulled out into their treatment groups throughout the day. This allows the youth to participate in treatment concurrently, rather than consecutively, and will increase the youth's ability to finish treatment and decrease the waiting times for youth entering treatment. This also ensures, much like the stable dorm assignments for staff, that the youth can build appropriate relationships with their direct care staff.

Staffing at the secure facilities remains a priority for the agency. Since the second quarter report, TJJD has hired two full-time recruiters whose mission it is to find qualified applicants to perform the role of youth development coaches at our facilities. Additionally, TJJD continues to calculate staffing needs based on the population of the facilities. Focusing on the true need for a certain staffing level—the youth population at the facility—TJJD is able to monitor the most accurate population needs and determine the staff based on the necessary supervision ratios. TJJD also anticipates the increase in salary for direct care staff from the latest legislative session to improve staff hiring and retention.

TJJD appreciates the opportunity to respond and provide an update to this OIO Report.